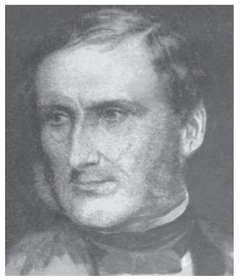
And so English came to Madras ...

The English language acquired its foothold in India in distinctly different ways in two of British India's Presidencies, Madras and Calcutta. An examination of the historiographic record on the development of the English language in India suggests that it was a colonialist imposition. This was largely true of the Calcutta experience that historians have chosen to focus on. However, in the Madras Presidency – generally overlooked by historians – the growth of the language benefited from the collaborative efforts of many players, both native and British. Far from being viewed as an imposition, the natives of Madras both demanded and supported the implementation of an English language policy.

It was not until the arrival of Sir Thomas Munro as Governor of Madras in 1820 that concrete steps were taken toward the formation of an education policy for Madras. While Munro's efforts at administrative reform are well known, his contribution to education has largely been ignored. Munro realised that the insular British administration, with its racial prejudices and language limitations, hindered effective governance. Lack of sufficient British personnel also meant that Government had to extensively rely on the languages skills of *dubashes* and other natives, some of whom indulged in embezzlements and fraud.

The solution to these problems lay in educating the native population. Little was known about the state of education in the Presidency before Munro's time. Munro realised that if Government was to play a role in the sphere of education, it was important to first understand the state of education in the Presidency. "We have made geographical and agricultural surveys of our provinces; we have investigated their resources, and endeavoured to ascertain their population; but little or nothing has been done to learn the state of education," Munro stated.

In 1822, Munro ordered a comprehensive survey on the state of education of the people of Madras, with each District Collector engaging in a detailed study that documented the complete list of schools in each district along with the number of scholars and teachers, caste and gender to which they belonged. The survey, which was completed in 1825, provides a detailed and fascinating view of



Lord Elphinstone.

education during the time. 188,650 students attended 12,498 schools out of a total population of 12,850,941 in the Presidency – only one school per 1000 persons and one student per 67 persons.

Munro then came up with the first set of Government proposals to improve the state of education. All schools in the Presidency were to be supported by an endowment from the Government. This was a radical proposal at the time. From being a non-participant, Munro was now proposing that Government become a sponsor of all education. What is truly remarkable was that Munro was fully cognisant of and sympathetic to native fears about British interference in their schools. He wrote, "It is not my intention to recommend any interference whatever in the native schools. Everything of this kind ought to be carefully avoided, and the people should be left to manage their schools in their own way."

Munro set the tone not only for his adminsitration's policies, but that of successive governments as well. In the decades to follow, the Madras Government's educational policy would be collaborative rather than confrontational. The Court of Directors of the East India Company (Indian rule had not passed on to Parliament yet) warmly applauded Munro's approach. Unfortunately for Madras, Munro died in July 1827.

Munro's successors Stephen Rumbold Lushington and Sir Frederick Adam did little to build on the foundation laid by Munro. However, the one bright note in Madras education was the dubash Pachaiyappa's bequest, which was used for the purpose of English language education at the suggestion of the then Advocate General, George Norton.

By the turn of the 19th Century, the city of Madras was well on its way to becoming one of India's largest and most prosperous cities. With a population in excess of 250,000, the erstwhile fishing village was rapidly transforming itself into a bustling centre of government, commerce and culture. Rising economic activity gave birth to supporting institutions such as banks and insurance companies. By 1812, there were twelve agency houses in Madras with such well-known names as Arbuthnot, De Monte & Co., and Parry & Pugh. The flourishing trade also attracted Portuguese, Jewish and Armenian merchants, giving the city a distinct cosmopolitan feel.

Coincident with, and contributing to the rise of Madras, was an upwardly mobile Indian mercantile class. This mercantile elite migrated from the deep Tamil-speaking south as well as from the Telugu-speaking country. The new Hindu gentry with its growing economic and social power sought English language education. They realised that knowledge of English enhanced their reputation with the British, paved the way for easier trade dealings with Europe, opened the doors to plum Government positions, and gave them the ability to negotiate directly with the British on their own terms, all of which formed the basis for a new self-confidence and ability.

Encouraged by George Norton, the leaders of the Hindu community formed the Hindu Literary Society in 1830. One of the leaders of the Society was Gajalu Lakshmanarasu Chetty, born into a komati merchant family in Madras in 1806. On completing his elementary school education in a local school, where he developed a fair proficiency in English, he joined his father's agency firm, G. Sidhulu & Co. Skilful speculation in the textile and indigo trades helped Lakshmanarasu Chetty's family grow into one of the wealthiest in Madras. Another leading member of the Hindu Literary Society was C. Srinivasa Pillay. The scion of a rich, upper caste Hindu family, Pillay believed that Western education was the key to India's regeneration. A trustee of the Pachaiyappa trust, the socially-minded Pillay was a close friend of George Norton and came under the influence of his progressive views.

Meanwhile, missionaries exploited the vacuum left in education by Munro's death. Alexander Duff was one such missionary. Duff arrived in Calcutta in 1830. Duff's brand of fiery and intrusive missionary zeal had its origins in the Scottish Enlightenment. Duff organised a school that taught history, geography, arithmetic, and Christianity. Sticking to the principle of downward filtration, Duff felt that converts (to Christianity) from 'respectable families' would be the torchbearers in a new line of self-perpetuating congregations in India. His associate missionary, John Anderson, who opened the Scottish Free Church School in Black Town, Madras, in 1837 carried on Duff's work in Madras. The purpose of the school was to impart a distinctively European type of education, with a focus on Christianity, communicated through the English language. Despite the clearly stated Christian mission of the school, it appealed to the deeply felt need for English language education among the growing Hindu elite of Madras. The school was so popular that it outgrew its premises three times within the first decade (the school later became Madras Christian College).

The leaders of the Hindu Literary Society were alarmed by the growing missionary influence in Madras. They realised that the desire for English language education among the elite Hindu was so great that Hindu families were prepared to take the chance of sending their children to missionary schools despite the risk of religious conversion. To Lakshmanarasu Chetty, Srinivasa Pillay, and Narayanaswamy Naidu, another leader of the Hindu Literary Society, fell the task of responding to the emerging missionary threat.

It was the arrival of John Elphinstone as Governor of Madras in 1839 that resulted in an extraordinary partnership between the Hindu elite and the British establishment in the sphere of education. Like Munro, Elphinstone evinced a keen interest in education and believed that Western education was the right tool to regenerate the natives of Madras. He wrote, "Nothing is more honourable to our rule than the attention paid to the subject of education of the people." Anxious to make education a central theme of his administration, he laboured to gain a mastery over the state of affairs of education by studying official papers and consulting both officials and non-officials in Madras. He had a knowledgeable ally and assistant in his Advocate General, George Norton.

The Hindu Literary Society led by Chetty, Pillay and Naidu quickly realised that the only way to counter the growing missionary threat was for a secular-minded Government to enter

(Continued on page 8)

Their English was spell-binding

Coming across the name of V.S. Srinivasa Sastri in a recent issue of *Madras Musings*, I was reminded of the distinguished scholar who rose from being the Headmaster of the Hindu High School in Triplicane to being a Privy Councillor in London during the Raj. It was a coveted honour and entitled him to be called the Right Hon'ble (Srinivasa Sastri). The honour was a significant result of his cultivation of his knowledge of English and its accent. The Concise Oxford Dictionary was said to have been his constant companion and helped him to perfect his pronunciation. I have heard him speak in the Kellet High School in Triplicane, lecturing on the *Ramayana*. It was a constant flow of mellifluous words which expounded the epic of old in lucid terms. Sastri was heard with rapt attention because of his English as much as for the content. No wonder he was hailed as the "silver-tongued orator."

He was, in fact, one of a long line of public speakers in English who were the toast of the 1940s and '50s in Madras. Sir C.P. Ramaswami Aiyar was a towering personality in public speaking of those times. Impeccably dressed, he once gave a lecture, which was equally impeccably constructed, in the Ranade Hall in Mylapore. It was to the point and lucid, and whatever he said was mulled over later by his audience to get the full impact of his ideas.

Dr. C.R. Reddy, educationist and scholar, had his own way of presenting his points. His lectures on 'Indian Democracy' in a hall on the first floor of *Senate House* had overflowing audiences because of the intellectual veneer of his thought and speech. His speeches had no frills, but the very force of the ideas he presented would overwhelm the audience.

Speaking of *Senate House*, I cannot but recall Dr. A. Lakshmanaswami Mudaliar, the record-setting Vice-Chancellor. He was a forceful speaker but with a slightly sing-song manner of speaking which did not detract from the flow of ideas and the lucidity of his language. His twin brother, Sir A. Ramaswami Mudaliar, was different from his younger brother. With his rich voice, whatever he said – and what he said was always well thought out – went down well with audiences.

On the Kashmir question, V.K. Krishna Menon's speech in the U.N. was a record performance. Quaffing cups of tea, as was his wont, he spoke sharply and with rapier-like wit. Soon after, when he came to Madras, he was invited to Presidency College to speak in the Big English Lecture Hall. He held forth, sharp and attorney-like.

A speaker of a different type was Sir C.V. Raman. It was again in the Big English Lecture Hall which has a very big stage. Dr. Raman spoke on crystals, and it was evident that his whole being was suffused with science as he moved this way and that on the stage, presenting enthusiastically and in simple, clear terms whatever needed to be understood of the facts of crystal science. It was a popular science lecture of unsurpassed value from a great scientist.

The same venue was host to Dr. Pattabhi Sitaramayya, a doctor who joined the Indian National Congress and made it to the highest level as a candidate for the presidentship of the party backed by the Mahatma himself against Netaji. Later, he wrote a history of the Congress, a valuable contribution from a veteran about the growth of the party. He was a great spokesman of the party and presented its viewpoint straightforwardly and unemotionally.

For sheer individuality and a distinctiveness of regional flavour, Justice A.S.P. Aiyar should be recalled. He had a witty approach and loaded the lecture with witticisms which sent the audience into peals of laughter. Yet there was an intellectual base to his humorous comments on men and affairs; you came away from his lectures laughing, but also moved to think about what he had said.

P.V. Rajamannar, who was Chief Justice of the Madras High Court, was on the side a literary figure, playwright and theatre enthusiast, and an art connoisseur. I remember even now how, when speaking at the inauguration of an art event in Mylapore, he made a long, lyrical statement that got spontaneous applause.

These are a few of the speakers in English who made the intellectual scene in Madras lively in the early days of Independence.

– M. Harinarayana
120/154 Big Street
Triplicane, Chennai 600 005

Not arriving shortly, but arrived

NEVER MIND THIS NEW UPSTART CHENNAI

Very briefly then,
I am middle class
and very Madras.

Born and raised in
West Mambalam –
the other side of the railway tracks
where fabled mosquitoes turn
people into elephants.

Went to college in
Khushboo sarees stripped
right off the absurdly voluptuous
mannequins at
Saravana Stores T. Nagar
Chennai 17.

To weddings I wore,
in deference to my mother,
silk kanjeevarams with temple
borders.
Every other girl
was a designer-sequined shimmer.

I thought nothing of
throwing away
my dreaming hours on
MTC's 47A,
sitting beside women who ruined my
view,
leaning casually across to
spit or
chuck
through the grime of windows
spinach stems they didn't fancy
in their evening kuzhambu,
hurling motherly advice at
young men who dared death by
swinging,
two-fingered,
from other women's windows.

My idea of a holiday
was rolling down the hillsides
of Ooty,
dressed in white
like Sridevi.
Objects of love-hate:
the auto annas.

And of course it is coffee that
defines
the limits of my imagination.
I never could think of it as
cappuccino or mocha or
anything other than
decoction coffee,
deep brown like my own Dravidian
skin.

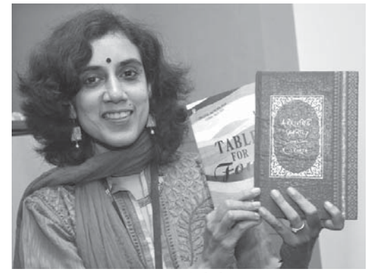
Lunch:
10.30 sharp: sambhar rasam curry.

Tiffin:
5 sharp: idli dosa vada.

My idea of arctic winter:
twentysix degree centigrade.

And so on and so forth as
they don't say in Tamil.

Never mind this new upstart
Chennai.
Madras, my dear, here I come!
About me, rest assured,
there is
no Bombay, no Delhi, no London
and certainly no New York.
I am all yours,
Madras, my dear,
wrap and filling!



K. Srilatha

Vijaysree Venkatraman in conversation with writer-academic K. Srilatha

This poem, *Bionote* by Prof. K. Srilatha of IIT-Madras's Department of Humanities and Social Sciences, is part of her recently-released collection of poems *Arriving Shortly*. She spoke to me after the release.

• Please tell us about the genesis of Bionote.

The poem was written on a sort of impulse. It was triggered by a comment I heard from a friend of mine – quite a culture-vulture himself – about another writer based in Bombay. My friend said that this writer was "so Bombay", meaning so typically a Bombayite or a Mumbaikar. It got me thinking about how he or others might see me and so this poem got written.

At the core of it, of course, lies my own love for the older version of this metro now called Chennai with all its malls – an older version which is thankfully still alive in certain pockets of the city – in Triplicane or Mylapore or Saidapet, for instance. This older Chennai that is not Chennai at all, but the Madras of my memories.

• As a Professor at IIT, Madras, do you teach creative writing to budding engineers and scientists?

The Humanities Department offers a five-year integrated programme leading to a Master's in English Studies or Development Studies. Our first batch has just passed out and they seem to be doing very well. This programme is altogether separate from the B.Tech programme.

At the same time, my colleagues and I offer electives in the Humanities (courses in Literature, Sociology, History, Philosopy, Economics and so on) to B.Tech students. My creative writing course has been offered both to our Master's students as well as to B.Tech students. On the whole I find teaching very rewarding. I think it enriches my writing and feeds it, in a way, though sometimes I wish I had more time to spend on my writing.

• What is the focus of your academic research?

My academic research is quite diffused. My Ph.D. was on the self-respect movement in Tamil Nadu and the journals that emerged in the wake of the movement. And I have translated some Tamil poems for the anthology *The Rapids of a Great River: The Penguin Book of Tamil Poetry*, which I also co-edited. I have just finished translating my mother Vatsala's Tamil novel *Vattathul* – literally, within a circle. So my research interests tend to focus on women's writing, contemporary fiction and translation.

• You are also a novelist and you've set Table for Four in the United States ...

Yes, my novel is set in Santa Cruz, a small university town in California, where I spent some time as a Fulbright scholar. That was the first time I left the country and travelled to another country. I missed everything – my hometown Madras, my friends and my hostel mates in Hyderabad where I was studying at the time. I remember remarking to my housemate that in America not even the sugar was as sweet as the one we got back home and he laughed and said, "Aren't you taking things too far?" Well, I do take things too far, which is why I write! I tend to see things from a somewhat extreme position.

• What are some things you love about your hometown – some things that should never change – other than its name?

The great food, the small lanes, the pavement shops, the bazaar in Ranganathan Street in T'Nagar, the aroma of jasmine, the sense that it is just one large village which has suddenly walked into a metro.

• What are some things about this place that absolutely need to change?

Public transport needs to improve and we need pavements to walk on. The pavement shops I mentioned before should only be on narrow streets where no traffic is allowed – then you can just walk and shop.

The streets need to be cleaner. Litter on the beach especially hurts me. And the drainage – one heavy rain and we cannot walk on the streets. These things need to change.

A CASE FOR THE DOSAI – A poetic presentation!

Indeed, idiomatically the idli wins
out.
We invariably speak of idli-dosai,
never of dosai-idli.
But I will be contrarian
and make out a case
for the relatively disregarded
dosai.

An idli is one big thing –
round and plump
bland and dumpy.
Dosais, on the other hand,
are many things
rolled into one (no pun intended).
They can be laughably small
or formidably large.

An honest MLA dosai
must extend unhygenically over
both sides of the table.
But most dosais resemble
your regulation
standard issue
newspaper-like
roll up
though a few
stand bold upright
shaped like cones.

Dosais may come
packed with paneer
loaded with kheema
mixed with eggs
stuffed with potatoes
and sprinkled with cheese.
Or you may prefer them as they are:
proud and alone.

Simply put,
dosais are
accommodating
amenable
responsive
cosmopolitan.

I rest my case.